

IMPORTANCE OF TURBAN FOR A SIKH

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INTRODUCTION

Turban is an English word used to refer to various types of headgear. A commonly used synonym is a PAGRI, the Indian word of turban. Turbans are popular form of headgear worn in the Middle East, North Africa & Southwest Asia. Turban in these countries is designed to help keep the user cool in hot desert environment such as the Sahara. Oxford dictionary defines Turban as a man's headdress of cotton or silk "wound round a cap or the head, worn especially by Muslims & Sikhs". In most of the Muslim and African Countries, men & women cover their head with a long piece of cloth. For Sikhs, Turban is termed as "PAGRI" and is an important part of dressing besides providing Cover for the head. In India, turbans are referred to as a *Pagri*. The word specifically refers to the headdress that is worn by men and needs to be manually tied. There are several styles which are specific to regions, religion, etc. A Pagri is a symbol of honour and respect across all regions where it is a practice to wear one. It is also why almost of all of these will honour important guests by offering them one to wear.

TYPES OF TURBANS

In British period, The Muslim elites of South Asia especially of western Punjab used to wear long pagri which was also a symbol of nobility, honour and respect. In Punjab and Sindh members of the landed aristocracy always wore this pagri. This pagri was a part of full formal dress and was used to wear with Sherwani.

The Sikh turban, known as the *Dastar*, is mandatory for all Khalsa Sikhs to wear. The *Pheta* is worn in Maharashtra and also has regional variants like Puneri and Kolhapuri pheta. In Mysore and Kodagu the turban is known as the *Mysore Peta*. The Rajastani turban is commonly called the *Pagari*. It will vary by caste, class, religion and region. It also serves practical functions like protecting from the elements, used as a pillow, blanket or towel. When unravelled, it is used like a rope where it is tied to a bucket to draw water from the well.

The Pagri will also vary in shape, size and colour. The colour will vary related to occasion it will be worn. For example, Saffron (associated with valour) is

worn during rallies, White (associated with peace) is worn by elders, Pink (associated with spring) is worn during the spring season or marriage ceremonies, etc.

TURBAN & 5 K'S Guru Gobind Singh Ji has prescribed 5 K's for a Sikh i.e. Kanga (Comb), KARA (Ring), Kaccha (Underwear), KES (Hair) and Kirpan (Sword). Each K has different meaning & importance for a Sikh. Guru Sahib has given greatest respect to a Sikh who observes 5 k's. He has said:-

“KHALSA MERO ROOP HAI KHAS

KHALSAI MEH HAUN KARIO NIVAS”

It means pure Sikh is my special face and I reside in the body of a Sikh. In observance of 5K's prescribed by Sikhism, a Sikh has to maintain long hair. In case these long hair are not maintained properly & kept naked, lot of dust & other germs from the atmosphere can get accumulated in the hair which can affect the health of a Sikh. As such, to cover the head, Sikh religion has prescribed Turban (PAGRI). Sikh has to cover his head at all times. During day while following worldly pursuits, a Sikh has to tie a Turban on his head and during rest in his house, a smaller version of Pagri i.e. “KESKI” (A Small piece of Cloth) has been prescribed. After baptism ceremony when Guru Gobind Singh presented 5 ‘Piras’

(beloved Sikhs) before the public, he prescribed a ‘Bana’ (Code of dressing) in which turban (PAGRI) was most important for a sikh. Guru Gobind Singh, in defiance of this infringement by the Mughals asked all of his Sikhs to wear the turban. This was to be worn in recognition of the high moral standards that he had charted for his Khalsa followers. He wanted his Khalsa to be different and to be determined "to stand out from the rest of the world" and to follow the unique path that had been set out by the Sikh Gurus. Thus, a turbaned Sikh has always stood out from the crowd, as the Guru intended; for he wanted his 'Saint-Soldiers' to not only be easily recognizable, but easily found as well.

PRACTICE OF TYING TURBAN

History is replete with instances where kings, princes, Chieftains', Armed forces, Brahmins and affluent people of upper classes have worn Turban to cover their heads. Indians Maharajas, Maratha warrior- Shivaji and Indian President Dr. Radha Krishnan are few of the examples. Even today, most of non Sikh villagers in the rural areas of Rajasthan, UP& Punjab put on Turban through out the day.

It has also been seen that during Hindu marriages, all the male participants put on coloured Turbans. The Turban is a sign of honour & respect for each participant.

TURBAN CONFERS RESPONSIBILITY

It is famous ritual amongst Sikhs & Hindus alike whenever the head of the family expires, the eldest son is offered a Turban which is tied on his head in full view of public in Gurudwaras & Mandirs which denotes transfers of responsibilities & duties of deceased head of family. The eldest son who ties the Turban provides plans for all type of security and guidelines to the entire family. It signifies that now he has shouldered the responsibility of his father and he is the head of the family.

PAGG DI LAJJ

The Sanskrit word **pak**, from which the Punjabi **pagg**, or turban, is obviously derived, stands for maturity and greyness of hair. Punjabi idiom and usage also testify to the importance of turban as a symbol of respectability. For example, **pagg di laj rakkhna**, literally to maintain the **honour of the turban**, means to behave in a **socially proper manner**; **pagg lahuna**, literally to knock off the turban, means to insult; and **pag vatauna**, literally to exchange turbans, signifies the transformation of friendship into brotherhood vowing fraternal love and loyalty. Until recent times wearing of a head-dress, turban or cap, usually of the former, by all men from boyhood onwards was almost universal in the Punjab. Even now customs persist preserving the importance of turban in Punjabi society and culture. A bridegroom, irrespective of the religious tradition he belongs to, would as a rule wear a turban on his wedding day. A turban is ceremonially presented to and worn by the son at the end of the obsequies in honour of a deceased parent. Turban is the coveted prize during wrestling matches.

TURBAN & SIKH GURUS

Right from Guru Nanak Devji to Guru Gobind Singh ji, all gurus & their disciples have been wearing Turban. No one has kept their heads naked, till date.

Sikhs wear Turban due to twin reasons firstly from health point of view & Secondly from respect and honour point of view. A Sikh wearing Turban automatically commands respect when people address him "Sardarji", 'Singh Sahib' & Singh (Sikh) is king.

HOW TO TIE TURBAN?

Length of Turban depends on individual choice. It ranges from 5 to 11 meters. One should wear washed & clean Turban every day after taking bath in the morning. While returning home in the evening, Turban should be removed from the head and kept at a safe place. Immediately thereafter head should be covered with KESKI (Smaller version of Turban). In this regard, Guru Gobind Singh has given his mandate as under:-

"Kangha dono vakt kar, paag chune kar bandhai."

Translation: *"Comb your hair twice a day and tie your turban carefully, turn by turn."*

Further Bhai Rattan Singh Bhangu ("Sri Gur Granth Parkash") add:-

"Doi vele utth bandhyo dastare, pahar aatth rakhyo shastar sambhare . . . Kesan ki kijo pritpal, nah (i) ustran se katyo vaal "

Translation: *"Tie your turban twice a day and carefully wear weapons 24 hours a day...."*

Take good care of your hair. Do not cut your hair."

PAG VATAUNI (EXCHANGE OF TURBAN)

People in Punjab have been and still do exchange turbans with closest friends. Once they exchange turbans they become friends for life and forge a permanent relationship. They take a solemn pledge to share their joys and sorrows under all circumstances. Exchanging turbans is glue that can bind two individuals or families together for generations.

WEARING OF TURBAN HAS PROVIDED EXEMPTION FROM HELMETS

A Sikh soldier would not wear a steel helmet even under shelling or firing. However, in some foreign countries the compulsion of wearing a turban, like the wearing of long, untrimmed hair, has sometimes led to the Sikhs being

placed in a position of conflict with employers or even governments whose rules or laws require the wearing of a cap or helmet.

The turban being religiously obligatory for the Sikhs, a more tolerant view has begun to be taken recently. For example, the Motor Cycle Crash Helmets (Religious Exemption) Act passed in British Parliament in 1976 exempts **"any follower of the Sikh religion while he is wearing a turban"** from having to wear a crash helmet. Similarly, the highest court of the country in the United Kingdom, the House of Lords, has ruled that Sikh drivers and conductors of public vehicles are not to be compelled to wear caps. Similarly in Canada in 1986 Sikhs in Metro Toronto Police were permitted to wear turbans while on duty, and since 1990 turbaned Sikhs may join The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

CONCLUSION

Turban is important sign to locate a Sikh amongst lakhs of persons. Turban is source of respect & honour which is bestowed upon a Sikh. It is an important part of dress which covers the head to keep the person healthy and away from diseases. Turban provides Sikh a distinct personality, independent. Individuality & disciplined life. Turban also motivates Sikh to emerge as leaders. Even few women, who have been baptised, wear Turban to cover their head. Turban is a pride for a Sikh.